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United for Quality Care

April 18, 2022
Brian Williams, Windsor
Substance Abuse Counselor, DMHAS
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

***In Support of* HR 11 and SR 12: RESOLUTION PROPOSING APPROVAL OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AND THE STATE EMPLOYEES BARGAINING AGENT COALITION (SEBAC)**

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Brian Williams and I am currently a Substance Abuse Counselor with 9 years of state service. I am speaking in support of House Resolution 11 and Senate Resolution 12.

The SEBAC contract is not just something that will increase wages and benefits for state workers. It protects and starts to repair the services that are desperately needed in Connecticut. The services that people depend on. Anyone who's seen the news about the recent tragic overdose deaths in our communities and the increased hospitalization of young people suffering from mental illness knows that the state's mental healthcare programs have been pushed past the breaking point. Connecticut has underfunded and understaffed this lifesaving healthcare for more than a decade. We've seen a 22% increase in overdose deaths in CT since the start of the pandemic.

Recently, I've had the experience of sitting in the screening office at CVH watching our members have to tell folks calling in that they can't fit them in, but they can go to the state website to check other places. Most of the time, if someone is calling us, it's because there is nowhere else available.

This contract represents an opportunity to invest in our residents, our communities and the services that help save lives. We need to restore capacity to pre-pandemic levels, but we also need to expand and open more beds. Merritt hall has the available units, but even before the pandemic we were not utilizing them. DMHAS needs to hire around 100 positions – 38 nurses, 60 direct care staff, and 14 clinical staff to restore our capacity to 110 beds and operationalize 30 more.

I came to the United States as a 19 year old with dreams of going to business school to be an international banker, and I got a job at a group home with some emotionally troubled boys. It changed my life and helped me to understand my own life, but most importantly, it helped me to realize how deep my passion was for this work. They taught me a lot. I stay in state service because we are able to help people transform their lives.

Thank you for your time.